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ARIA ANGELA

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ARIA ANGELA

HEAVENLY CREATURES PART 1 OF 2

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The Age of Wonders

Looking back, of course, it truly was an age of wonders.
But then again, aren't they all?

To be English at the end of the 19th Century was to be a lord of creation, to play a part, no matter how humble, in the seizing and shaping of the world. It was an age of science, art and beauty, an age that worshipped reason, prized youth and honored justice. An age of bold discoveries and brave adventures. The age of Pan and Wonderland, the smart salon and "The Light of the World." Serpentine days and Wildean nights.

But it was also an era of cruelty, an age of extreme poverty and unspeakable horrors. The age of the workhouse and the gin mill, the "White Man's Burden" and Jack the Ripper.

In the middle of it all, Our Victoria sat like a fat spider, admiring the scale and dimension of her web. The British Empire reached hungrily across the globe, to Africa, India, Australia, North and South America... We lived with one unassailable goal: To make the world England. And we wouldn't be satisfied till penguins in Antarctica ceased their penguin business everyday at four o'clock sharp and drank a piping cup of Earl Grey from fine bone china.

Still, as the end of the century approached, there was a sense that things couldn't last. Prince Albert, the Royal Consort, had died many years earlier, and the whole of the empire was still draped in mourning clothes, fascinated with death and what lay beyond.

An earlier obsession with naturalism gave way to a mania for all things supernatural. Angels, faeries, ghosts and goblins, pookas, banshees, sprites and bogies, these things were suddenly discussed in the same sober tones as the theories of Darwin and Wallace. It wasn't enough anymore to catalogue every species of butterfly and swamp beetle. Learned men now began writing earnest papers concerning the dry weight of fairy wings, or describing the mating rituals of the Hertfordshire wood nymph.

It's funny how people never see what's in front of them. Looking for spirits in darkened parlors or in jars of swamp gas, they missed the genuine specimens that roamed right under their over-educated noses.

And of all the events of that wild, fecund era, to my mind, nothing can compare to the Adventure of the Fairy Princess and the Mad Angel, and the bloody trouble they almost loosed on the world.

Lady Kildare, princess of Faerie, heir of the House of Dannan, had made her home in the mundane realm for centuries, more comfortable in the common world than her mystic homeland. As for the Angel, well… how it came to be that her fate twined with ours, you are about to read.

Now that I am an old man, long in tooth and thin of coat, I remember those days with a fondness that they perhaps do not merit. Still, allow an old fool his illusions. For all its gruesome crimes, its misery and disease, for all the countless bones of innocents buried beneath the columns of empire, it was indeed an age of wonders, one which will never be seen again.

But then, aren't they all?

PRELUDE...
LET ME SING A FAIR DITTY 'BOUT POOR LONDON CITY. SHE'S A DOWAGER EMPRESS WIV' A SECOND HAND-CROWN.
SHE'S A VIOLET IN WILT, SHE'S A STRUMPET IN GILT. HIDES A THOUSAND DARK SECRETS IN THE FOLDS OF HER GOWN.
ONCE QUEEN OF FAIR MAY-DAYS, SHE'S NOW NOTHING BUT GREY DAYS SMOKING AND CHOKING ON SOOT BLACK AS SIN.
SHE'S A WITHERED OL' SPINSTER, FROM PALL MALL TO WESTMINSTER. HER GLORY DAYS PAWNED FOR A BOWLFUL'V GIN.
OLD DAYS OF LEGEND AND LORE, AND ENCHANTMENTS GALORE, LIKE A GHOST IN THE FOG BANKS, THEY'VE FADED AND GONE.
BUT IF YOU LOOK A BIT CLOSER, PAST THE END OF YOUR NOSE, SIR. YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED WOT YE STUMBLE UPON.
OH YES, YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED WOT YE STUMBLE UPON.
WHAT D'YE SAY, GUV? TRY YER LUCK?

LADY MORGAN'S MIDSUMMER'S BALL. THE MOST NOTORIOUS AND MOST POORLY KEPT SECRET OF THE LONDON SEASON. A FANCY-DRESS BACCHANAL FOR EVERY WELL-HEELED MISCREANT IN ENGLAND.
I WOULDN'T HAVE MISSED IT FOR THE WORLD.
YOU'D EXPECT THAT THE MINISTERS AND CLERGYMEN WOULD HAVE HAD IT SHUT DOWN LONG AGO. EXCEPT HALF OF THEM WERE IN ATTENDANCE.
DABBLERS AND DILETTANTES, CLOSET WARLOCKS AND HOLIDAY PAGANS.
ANY OLD FOOL WHO FANCIED HIMSELF TO HAVE A BIT OF MAGIC.
AND THEN, OF COURSE, THERE WAS A HANDFUL OF THE TRULY EXTRAORDINARY.

CREATURES SO RARE AND EXQUISITE, THAT MOST WOULDN'T DREAM THEY COULD WALK AMONG US.
NEXT THING, THEY'LL BE SAYING THOSE BRUTES CAN RULE THEMSELVES. UTTER ROT.
YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCUSE MY HUSBAND. HE'S UNDER THE MISIMPRESSION THAT HE IS OCCASIONALLY RIGHT. I, ON THE OTHER HAND--
KILDARE! OVER HERE!
DARLING, I DIDN'T THINK YOU WOULD MAKE IT. WHEN DID YOU GET BACK FROM PARIS?
JUST LAST WEEK. IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU. AND HOW ARE YOU, SIR ALEC?
IT'S BEEN A BEASTLY YEAR, I'M AFRAID. "ANNO HORRIBILIS," AS THE POETS SAY.
TAKE YER WRAP, MUM?
I HEARD ABOUT YOUR GRANDSONS. I'M VERY SORRY.
WELL, WE'LL JUST HAVE TO DANCE AGAINST THE DARKNESS, WON'T WE? RALLY OUR SPIRITS TO FEND OFF THE LONG SHADOWS...
OF COURSE WE WILL, ALEC.
IT'S WHAT WE DO BEST.

ENTERING THE GRAND SALON WAS LIKE STEPPING INTO A GREAT, GILDED SNUFF-BOX, THE AIR PERFUMED WITH OPIUM AND HOT-HOUSE ORCHIDS. A GLITTERING PANTOMIME OF POLITE DECADENCE, ALL APPETITES WHETTED IF NOT ENTIRELY SATISFIED. TEETERING ON THE EDGE OF THIS PARTICULAR FIN DE SIECLE, TO BE "MORALLY BOLD" SEEMED A MOST FASHIONABLE WAY TO RISE ABOVE NATURE.

IT ALWAYS MAKES ONE FEEL SO SUPERIOR TO IMAGINE ONESELF SIMPLY ABOVE COMMON MORALITY.

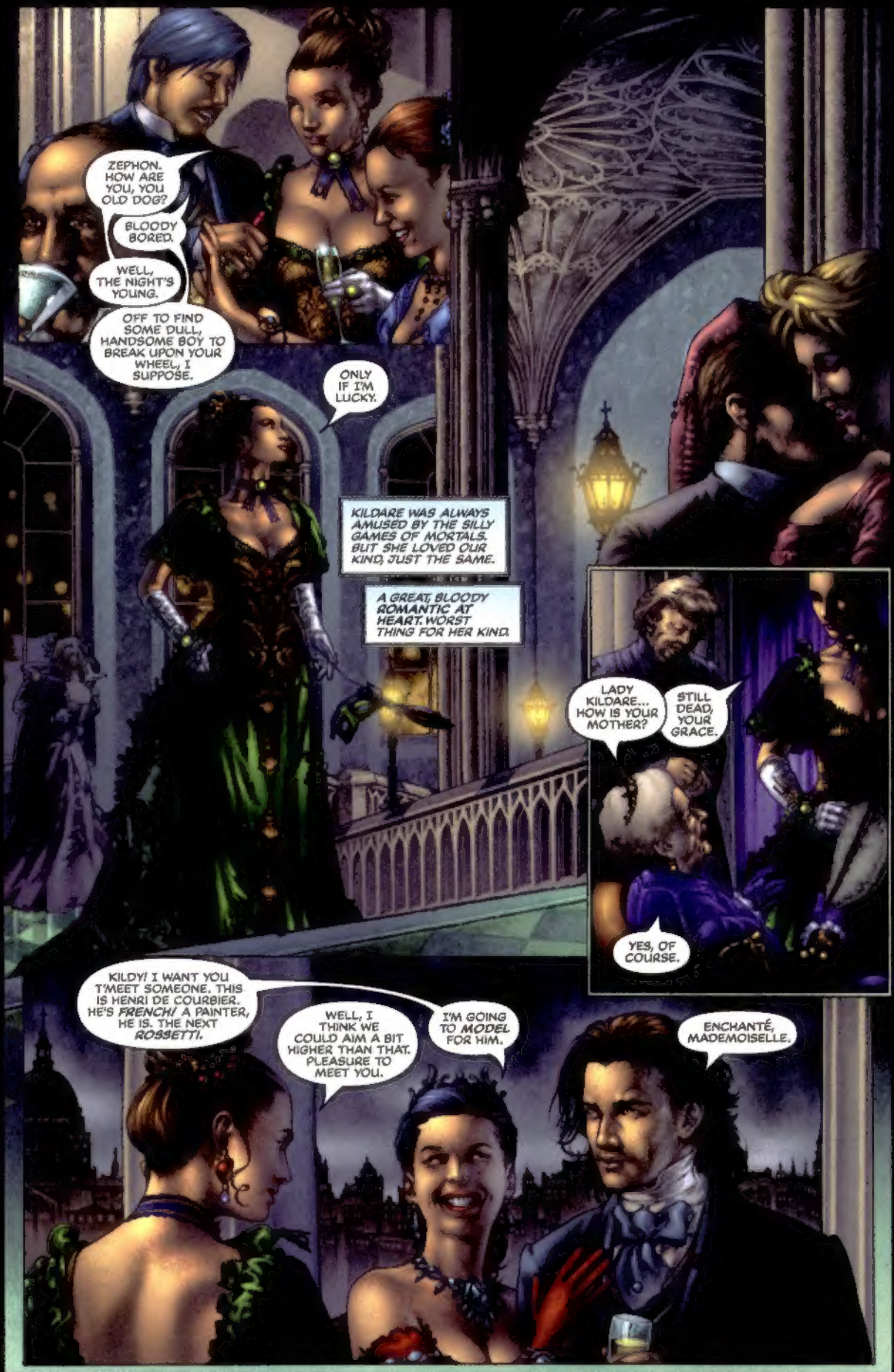
THERE THEY WERE, SUNDRY SCOUNDRELS, LIBERTINES OF EVERY STRIPE, GATHERED TOGETHER, CONVINCED THEIR CLUMSY GROPINGS WOULD SOMEHOW USHER IN THE RETURN OF PAN. BEHIND THEIR MASKS, THEY BLUSHED, LIKE NAUGHTY SCHOOL CHILDREN WHO THINK THEY'RE GETTING AWAY WITH SOMETHING.

THAT'S IT LOVE, BUT TRY IT *COUNTER-CLOCKWISE...*

"SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY, LIKE THE *NIGHT*, OF CLOUDLESS CLIMES AND *STARRY SKIES...*"

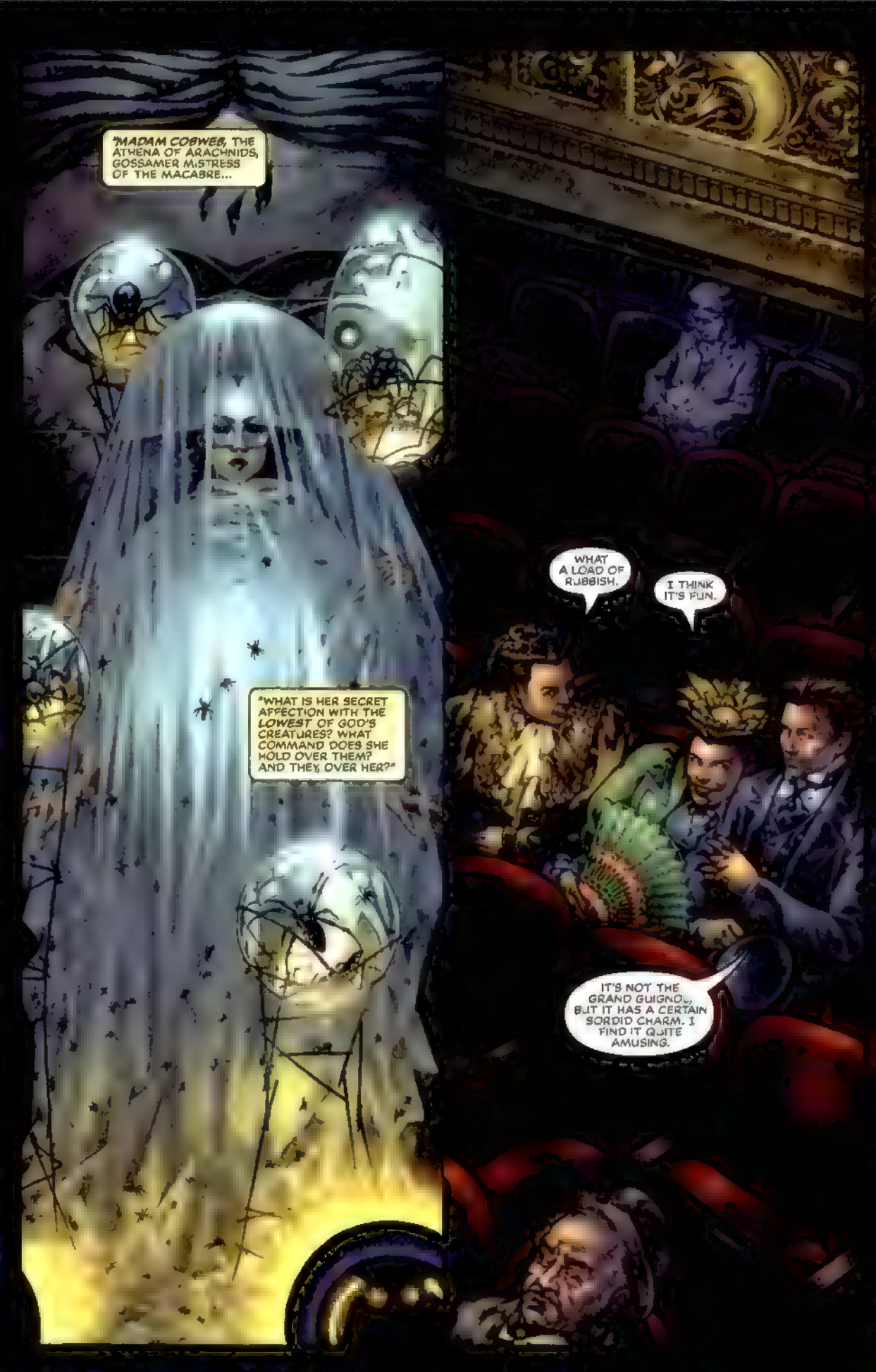
I ONCE DREAMED I WAS A CHINAMAN'S BUTTERFLY.

IT'S CALLED A "PLENARY INDULGENCE." ALL YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN *IN ADVANCE*. I CAN *SELL* YOU ONE...


ZEPHON. HOW ARE YOU, YOU OLD DOG?
BLOODY BORED.
WELL, THE NIGHT'S YOUNG.
OFF TO FIND SOME DULL, HANDSOME BOY TO BREAK UPON YOUR WHEEL, I SUPPOSE.
ONLY IF I'M LUCKY.
KILDARE WAS ALWAYS AMUSED BY THE SILLY GAMES OF MORTALS. BUT SHE LOVED OUR KIND, JUST THE SAME.
A GREAT, BLOODY ROMANTIC AT HEART. WORST THING FOR HER KIND.
LADY KILDARE... HOW IS YOUR MOTHER?
STILL DEAD, YOUR GRACE.
YES, OF COURSE.
KILDY! I WANT YOU T'MEET SOMEONE. THIS IS HENRI DE COURBIER. HE'S FRENCH! A PAINTER, HE IS. THE NEXT ROSSETTI.
WELL, I THINK WE COULD AIM A BIT HIGHER THAN THAT. PLEASURE TO MEET YOU.
I'M GOING TO MODEL FOR HIM.
ENCHANTÉ, MADEMOISELLE.

WHERE KILDARE DISAPPEARED TO THAT NIGHT, I CANNOT SAY. BUT LATER IN THE WEEK, SHE MET UP FOR A WALKABOUT WITH LISELLE AND HENRI.
LISELLE WAS A FORMER FLOWER GIRL. HOW SHE FELL IN WITH KILDARE'S CROWD I NEVER LEARNED. HENRI WAS AN INSUFFERABLE PRICK WHO YEARNED TO SEE THE "REAL" LONDON.
I'M STILL SURPRISED KILDARE DIDN'T STUFF HIM DOWN A SEWER.
YOU SEE, I HAVE THE "NOSTALGIE DA LA BOUE." I AM DRAWN TO SQUALOR AND DECAY.
THE BEAUTY OF THE COMMON MAN'S STRUGGLING WITH HIS LOT, IT IS... TRANSCENDENT TO ME.
WELL, I'M SURE THE COMMON MAN MUST BE PLEASED TO BE SUCH A GREAT SERVICE TO YOU.
YOU HAVE T'SEE HIS DRAW'RINGS. HE'S UTTERLY BRILLIANT.
DID YOU KNOW, KILDY ONCE POSED FOR MR. ROSSETTI?
IS THIS TRUE? YOU MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE YOUNG.
NOT EXACTLY. I'M... OLDER THAN I LOOK.
HOY-YAH, MISTAH! TAKE YER DOVES AND SEE SOMETHING WORTH SEEING!
WELL, ISN'T THIS A SHIT-HOLE? YOUR FRIEND CERTAINLY FOUND HIS "SQUALOR AND DECAY."
HUSH! IT'LL BE FUN.
THRUPPENCE A HEAD, GUV. BETTER HURRY IF YOU WANT A GOOD SEAT.

--DR. PETER TRAUM, MAESTRO OF THE MYSTERIOUS, AT YOUR SERVICE
WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO SEE IS A COLLECTION OF CURIOSITIES, CULLED FROM THE FARTHEST ENDS OF CREATION
FROM THE SPICED DESERTS OF ARABY TO THE DARK WATERS OF THE CONGO, FROM THE WILD PLAINS OF THE AMERICAS TO THE VAST STEPPES OF THE URALS...
LADIES OF GENTLE TEMPERAMENT, AND THOSE WEAK OF HEART, MAY WANT TO SIT NEAR THE EXIT.
AND NOW, OUR FIRST EXHIBIT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY...
"DANTE, THE DACHAU DEVIL. HUMAN CANDLE AND MASTER OF PYROMANCY...
"IMPERVIOUS TO FLAMES, BOTH NATURAL AND UNNATURAL, HE BREATHES BRIMSTONE AND EATS COAL."


"MADAM COBWEB, THE ATHENA OF ARACHNIDS, GOSSAMER MISTRESS OF THE MACABRE...
"WHAT IS HER SECRET AFFECTION WITH THE LOWEST OF GOD'S CREATURES? WHAT COMMAND DOES SHE HOLD OVER THEM? AND THEY, OVER HER?"
WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH.
I THINK IT'S FUN.
IT'S NOT THE GRAND GUIGNOL, BUT IT HAS A CERTAIN SORDID CHARM. I FIND IT QUITE AMUSING.

AND NOW, FOR MY *LATEST* AND *GREATEST* ACQUISITION. A BEING WHOSE KIND IS FABLED THROUGH EVERY LAND ACROSS THE GLOBE...

CAST DOWN FROM BRIGHTEST HEAVEN, FOR TRESPASSES WE CANNOT IMAGINE. SHE IS POSSESSED OF UNSPEAKABLE *BEAUTY*, AND UNIMAGINED *POWER!*

PLEASE DIRECT YOUR COMPLETE ATTENTION TO THE CENTER STAGE. I GUARANTEE YOU, YOU'VE NEVER WITNESSED THE LIKES OF THIS BEFORE!

SIGH NOT LIKELY.

ARE YOU TWO READY TO GO--

BLOODY HELL.

BEHOLD! HEAVEN'S EXILE, THE CELESTIAL SIREN. I GIVE TO YOU THE *FALLEN ANGEL!*

AS HER *TRUE NAME* IS UNPRONOUNCEABLE TO THE MORTAL TONGUE, I SIMPLY CALL HER *ANGELA!*

MARK MY WORDS I WILL DESTROY YOU FOR THIS.

WELL, THAT WAS A RATHER LACKLUSTER PERFORMANCE. LET'S SEE IF WE CAN'T DO A BIT BETTER FOR THE EVENING SHOW.
THOUGH MY RACE IS SWORN TO PROTECT YOURS, MAKE NO MISTAKE: RELEASE ME NOW OR I WILL KILL YOU. SLOWLY, AND VERY PAINFULLY.
I WILL BITE OFF YOUR BALL-SACK, SPIT IT OUT IN YOUR MOUTH... I'LL DELIVER YOU TO HELL MYSELF.
TSK TSK. SUCH TALK FROM ONE SO EXHAULTED. IT REALLY HAS GROWN TIRESOME
SLOWLY... AND VERY, VERY PAINFULLY...
TOSS HER IN.
DON'T THINK I'LL FORGET ABOUT YOU TWO. I'LL BLISTER THE FLESH FROM YOUR BONES.
SHUT YER GOB, MISS.
JUST DOIN' OUR JOBS, MISS.
I'LL--
AND DON'T BOTHER TO FEED HER. SHE DOESN'T NEED IT

I CANNOT IMAGINE WHAT SHE MUST HAVE FELT, THAT POOR CREATURE, LOCKED AWAY IN SOME DANK, DREARY CELL.
A ONCE PROUD WARRIOR OF HEAVEN, HUMBLED BY MORTAL MISCHIEF. GOD'S CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT, LAID LOW BY GOD'S GREATEST BLUNDER.
I CAN PICTURE HER THERE, ANGER SEETHING IN THE DARKNESS, DREAMING OF ESCAPE...
THEIR PRIDE, YOU SEE, IS QUITE BEYOND OUR IMAGINING. SO TOO, IS THEIR VENGEANCE.

AS FOR OUR HUMBLE NARRATOR...
HE WAS TUCKED SAFELY AWAY AT HIS MANOR HOUSE.
ENJOYING A SPOT OF EXERCISE...
AND A NICE WARM MEAL.

AFTER ALL, NOT EVERYONE'S LIFE CAN REVOLVE AROUND SECRETS AND INTRIGUE.
ARE YOU IN, SIR?
YES, HOPKINS. WHAT IS IT?
PARDON ME, BUT SIR HAS A VISITOR. A LADY KILDARE.
TELL HER I'LL BE RIGHT DOWN

SIR WILL BE WITH YOU DIRECTLY, MADAM. WOULD YOU CARE FOR TEA WHILE YOU WAIT?
THANK YOU.
LADY KILDARE, TO WHAT DO I OWE THIS MOST EXQUISITE PLEASURE? SOMETHING UGLY AND SCANDALOUS, I HOPE.
WILL THAT BE ALL, SIR?
YES, HOPKINS. THANK YOU.
SO AM I TO ASSUME YOU'VE FINALLY GIVEN IN TO MY CONSIDERABLE CHARMS?
SILLY BOY. I'M HARDLY YOUR *TYPE*.
HMM YOU KNOW, I CAN STILL SMELL BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS.
NOW, SERIOUSLY. WHAT BRINGS YOU OUT HERE AT THIS HOUR?
I'M SURE I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU MEAN BY THAT, DARLING.
INFORMATION WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME, ZEPHON...
...ABOUT *ANGELS*?

I TOLD HER EVERYTHING I KNEW ON THE SUBJECT, WHICH I CONFESS WASN'T MUCH. I ALSO TOLD HER THAT WHATEVER WAS HAPPENING, IT WAS NONE OF HER BLOODY BUSINESS.
OF COURSE, SHE DIDN'T LISTEN TO ME.
PETALS SWEET... AND FRAGRANCE DEEP...
TIDES OF N GHT ... AND WAVES OF WONDER...
EMBRACED IN VELVET WINGS OF SLEEP...
FLOAT IN DEPTHS OF DREAMLESS SLUMBER ..

BY NOW, THE POOR ANGEL COULD FEEL THE HATE WELL UP LIKE BILE IN HER THROAT.

TO BE DISHONORED SO... PARADING HER HUMILIATION THRICE DAILY BEFORE THE MOTLEY RABBLE...THEY WOULD ALL PAY DEARLY FOR THIS.

SHE WAS A SERAPHIC WARRIOR, ONE OF HEAVEN'S ELITE.

BORN TO HUNT HELLSPAWN DEMONS, TO SLAY MONSTROUS DRAGONS.

TILL ONE DAY ON SOME DISTANT STAR, THE BATTLE GOES WRONG...

AND SHE COMES CRASHING DOWN TO EARTH LIKE A BURNING METEOR.

DAZED BUT UNHARMED, SHE LAY STILL IN THE LONG GRASS...

ONLY TO BE FOUND BY SOME WANDERING CHARLATAN...

TRAPPED, POWERLESS IN THE DARK, WONDERING HOW SHE COULD EVER ESCAPE.
PETALS SWEET...
TRUE, SHE COULD OUTLIVE HER MORTAL CAPTOR, WALK AWAY WHEN HIS FRAME TURNED TO DUST. BUT PATIENCE WAS HARDLY ONE OF HER VIRTUES.
TO BE RENDERED HELPLESS...THAT WAS THE ONE INJURY SHE COULD NOT BEAR.
AND FRAGRANCE DEEP. .
NO ONE EVEN KNOWS SHE'S THERE.
HELLO ..

DON'T BE AFRAID. I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE
HELLO? ARE YOU IN HERE?
WHO THE DEVIL ARE YOU? TELL ME NOW BEFORE I POP YOUR HEAD OFF!
I AM CALLED KILDARE. I'M IMMORTAL LIKE YOU I-I'VE COME TO HELP YOU.

NO. YOU'RE NOT LIKE ME. YOU'RE---
SHIT.
WELL, WELL. ISN'T THIS A COZY TWOSOME...
TO BE CONTINUED

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Part 2 of 2

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England's Dreaming

Now, where was I before we were interrupted?

It was a Golden Age of Empire, of art and exploration and invention. England slept soundly at night, safe in the knowledge that her power and position were unrivaled in the modern age. And when she slept, she dreamed.

Richly scented opium dreams, filled with jewels of Pharaohs and Rajas that would rain like hailstones into her coffers. Dreams of endless railroads that would bind up continents like Christmas ribbon. Of countless wonders to be collected, counted and catalogued.

When they dream, Empires always dream of More.

It was an age of brave deeds and heroic tales, tales of savagery and sentiment, tales which have grown to legend in the flattering glow of gas-lit memory.

But there's a tale no one knows.

Lady Kildare, Fairy Princess by birth, adventuress and bon vivant by nature, had happened upon a remarkable sideshow in a rundown West End theatre.

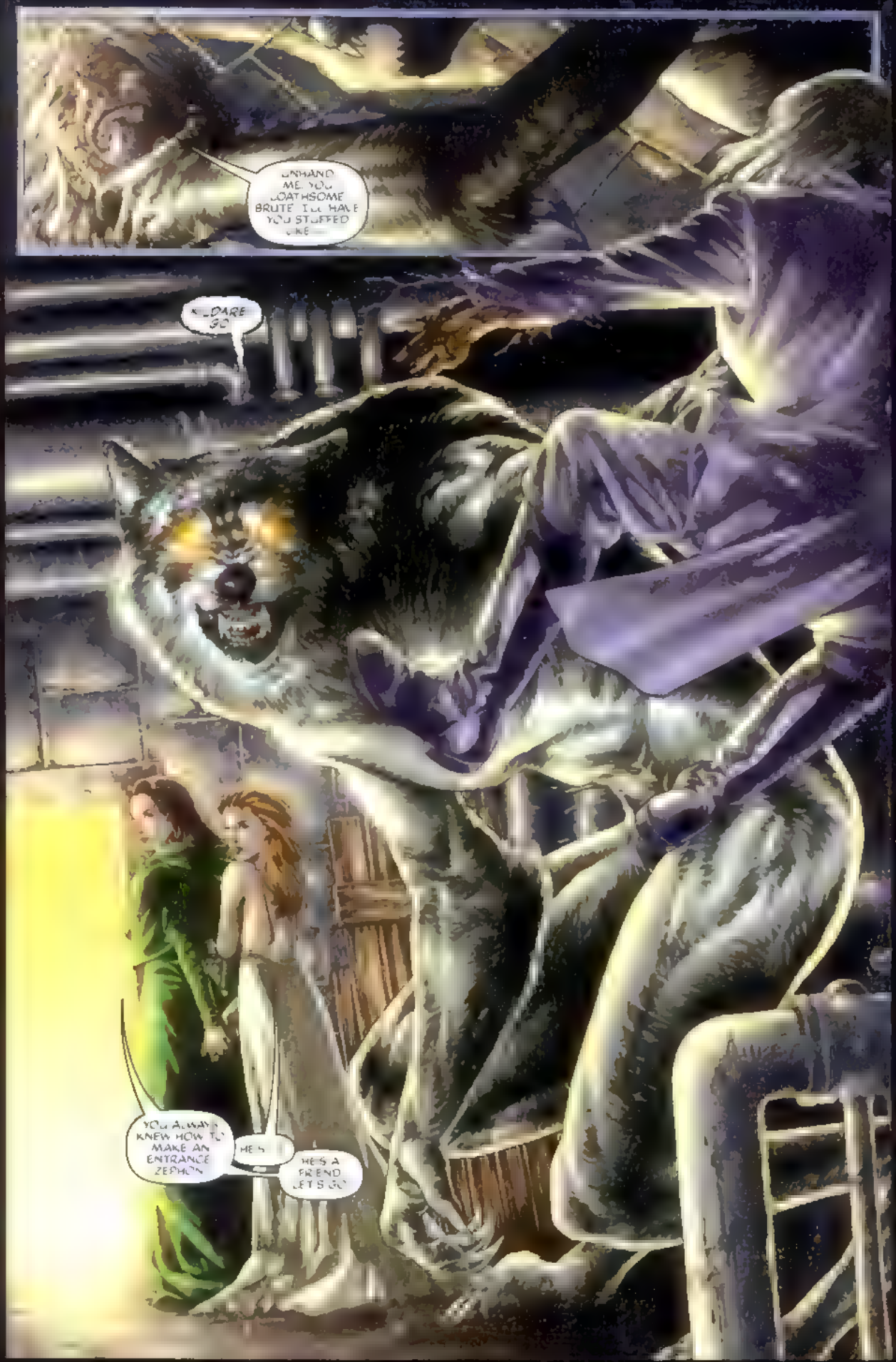
"Dr. Peter Traum's Traveling World of Curiosities."

There, among the halfpenny fakes and three-penny freaks, Kildare spied the most amazing sight. An Angel. A Warrior Maid of Heaven, stripped of both mantle and power, trotted out for show like some exotic ape.

Lady Kildare, whose sympathy for the more unique creatures of this world is not to be underestimated, sneaked back into the theatre after dark, seeking to free the imprisoned Angel. But before an escape could be managed, they were discovered by the proprietor himself, and it seemed amply clear that there was more to Dr. Traum than met the eye.

At this point (and one does not mean to flatter oneself) our fair damsels were in dire need of a dashing hero to come to their rescue...

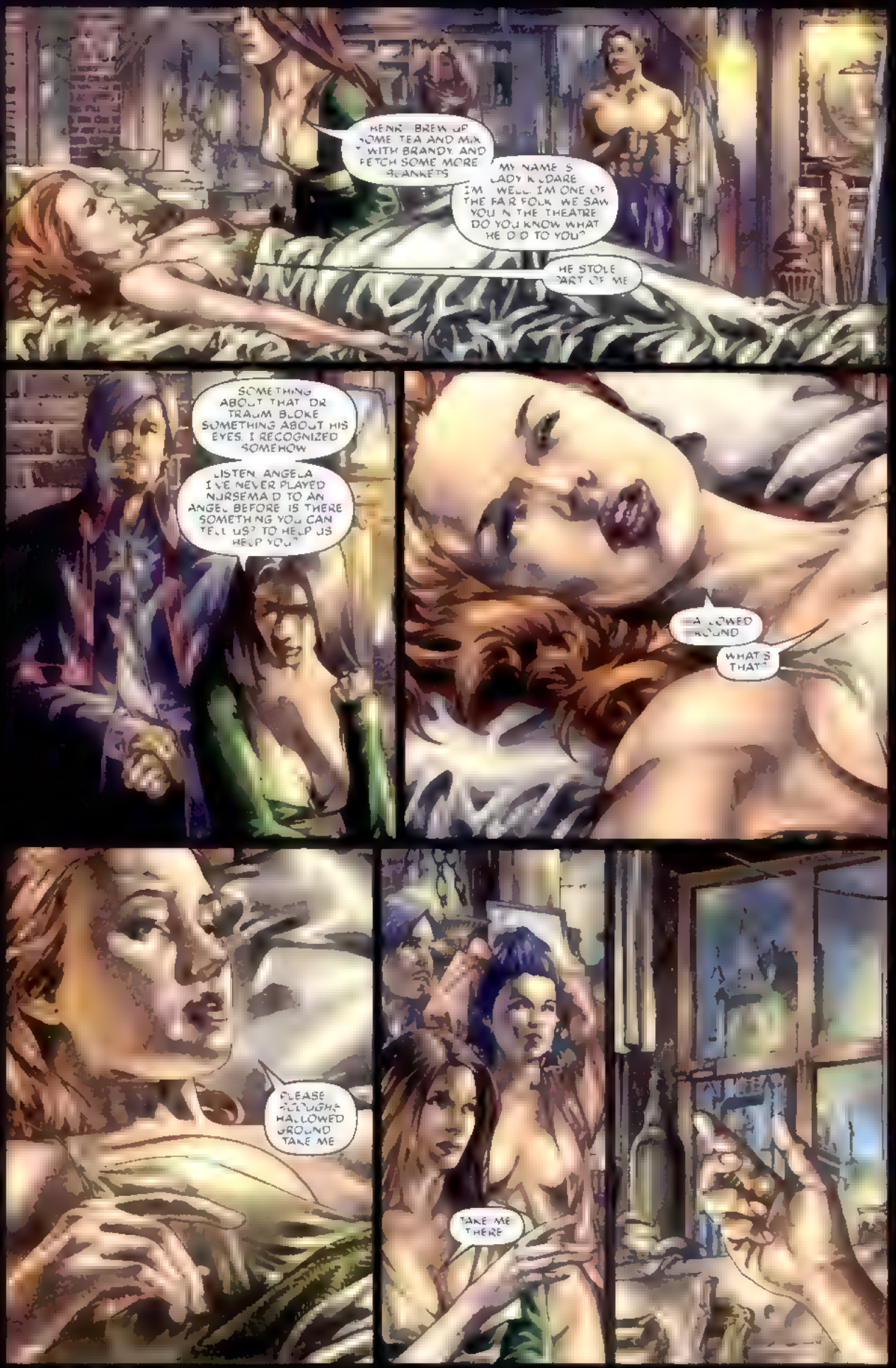
MY GOOD LADY, ARE YOU WHAT I THINK YOU ARE? WHAT A DELIGHTFUL SURPRISE
I DIDN'T THINK THERE WERE MANY OF YOUR KIND LEFT. YOU'LL MAKE A SPLENDID ADDITION TO OUR LITTLE MENAGERIE
HAAH!
RAAARGHN!

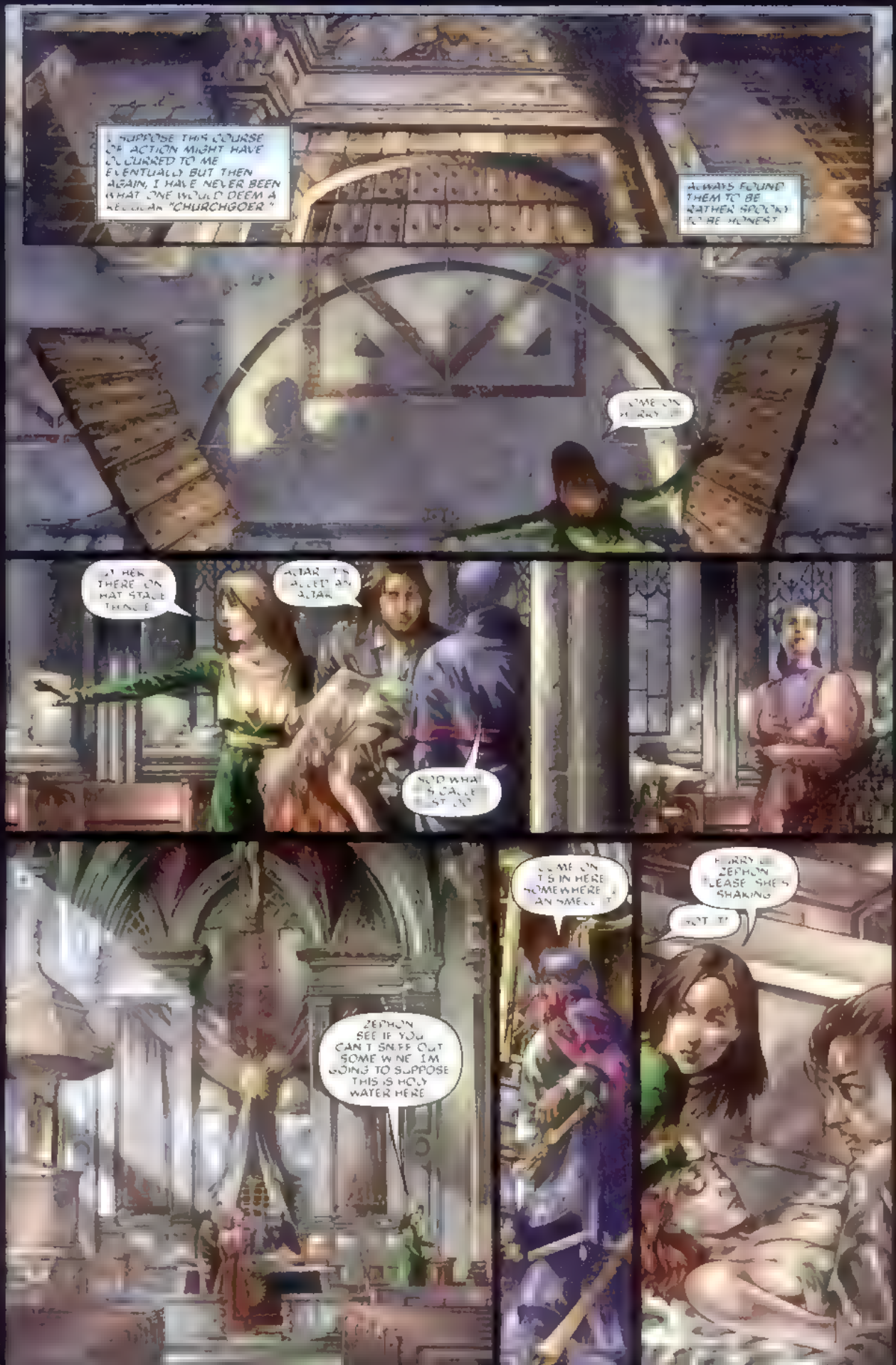

UNHAND ME, YOU LOATHSOME BRUTE I'LL HAVE YOU STUFFED LIKE—
I DARE GO
YOU ALWAYS KNEW HOW TO MAKE AN ENTRANCE ZEPHON
HE'S A FRIEND. LET'S GO

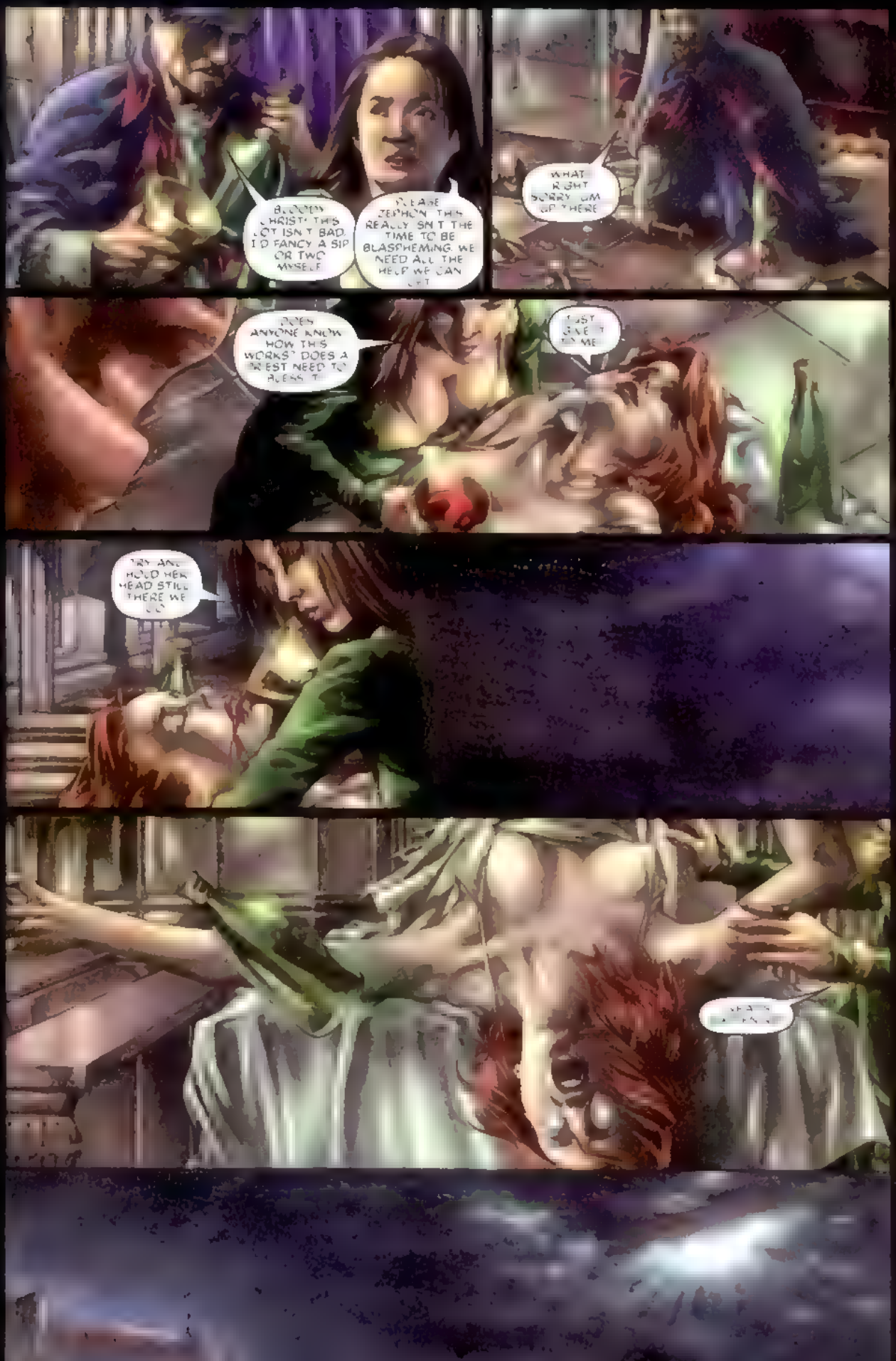
HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE PINNED AGAINST THE WALL LIKE A MOTH NAILED TO A BOARD?
WAIT
YOU HAVE LAID HANDS ON A WARRIOR OF HEAVEN. YOU SHALL PAY DEARLY FOR THE INSULT BELIEVE ME
CONSIDER THIS A BOUNCE
CAN WE PLEASE GET THE BLOODY HELL OUT OF HERE?

OUR LITTLE EPISODE OF DARING ADVENTURE BEHIND US WE STAGGERED OUT INTO LONDON'S GRAY BELLS LIKE THREE MAYBUG BEGGARS
I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO BLOODY KILL HIM ZEPHON
SORRY YOU HAD TO SEE THAT SOMETIMES THE ANIMAL TAKES OVER
I'M NOT SAYING IT WOULD BE A BAD THING
NO H
WE'LL NEVER GET A CARRIAGE AT THIS HOUR HMM SELLE'S FLAT'S NOT FAR FROM HERE
MY DEAR ARE YOU ALRIGHT
KILDARE I DON'T THINK YOUR FRIEND HERE LOOKS SO WELL
ANGELA MY NAME IS ANGELA
HOW ORIGINA
COME BACK TUESDAY I'LL AVE THE RENT THEN SWEAR TO IT MAAM
OPEN THE DOOR IT'S ME

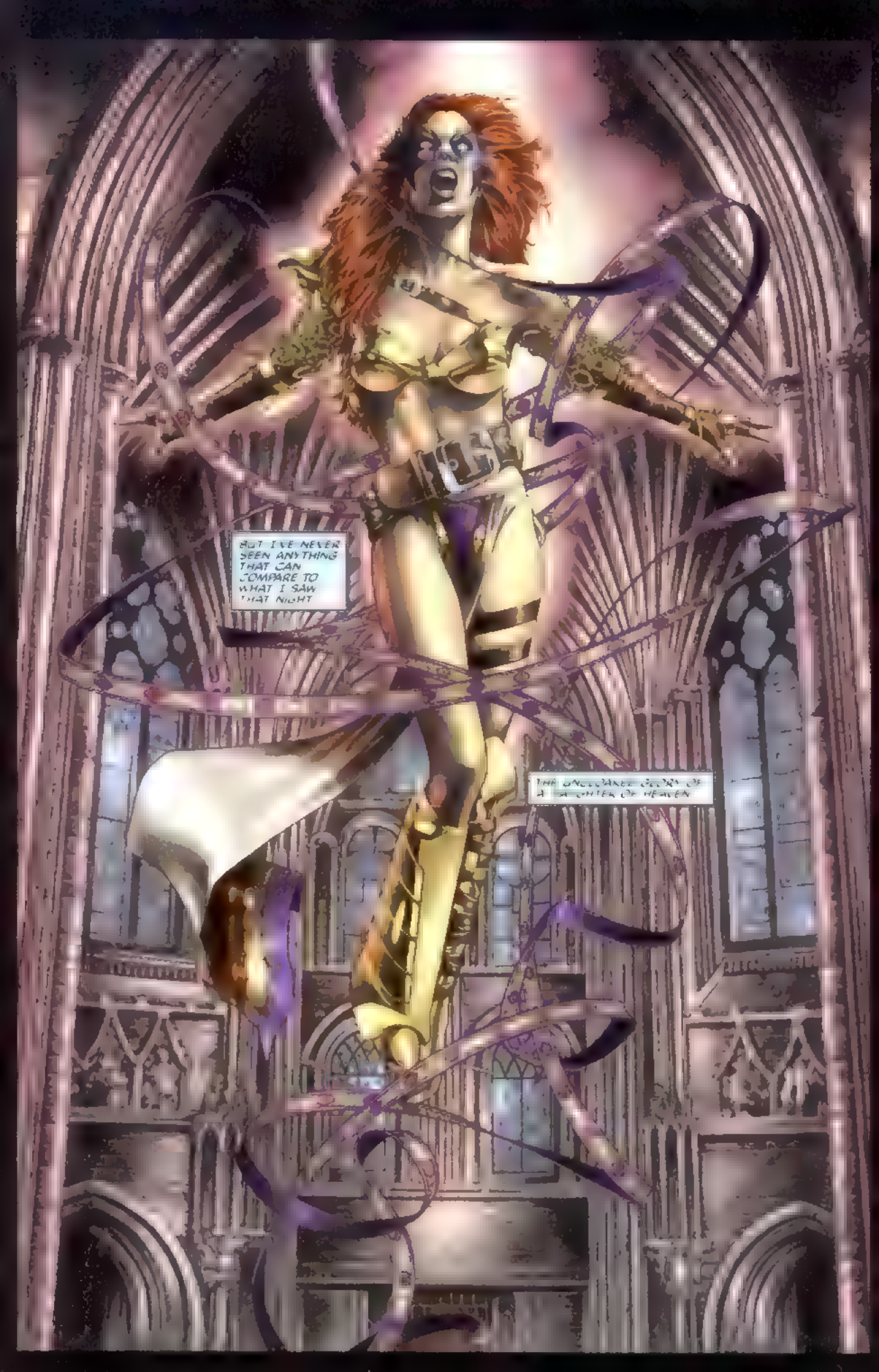
IT'S AN EMERGENC
KILDARE? WHAT ARE YOU AAIEE!
SORRY FOR THE FUSS, MISS LOVELY BREASTS, BY THE WAY
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?
YOU CAN'T BRING SOME GIN-SOAKED STROLLOP ROUND MY FLAT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT YOU'LL AVE THE COPPERS ON ME
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS INTRUSION?
AH, I TAKE IT YOU'RE THE USELESS PAINTER FRIEND. BE A GOOD LAD, FRENCHIE, AND CLEAR OFF THE BED, PLEASE.
SHE'S NOT A STROLLOP. SHE'S AN ANGEL. AND SHE'S DYING
ANGELA, ANGELA, CAN YOU HEAR ME?
THANK YOU...
KILDARE, GET OVER HERE
THANK YOU FOR TRYING
CHRIST, SHE'S LIKE ICE


HENK. BREW UP SOME TEA AND MIX WITH BRANDY AND FETCH SOME MORE BLANKETS
MY NAME'S LADY KLOARE I'M WELL I'M ONE OF THE FAR FOLK WE SAW YOU IN THE THEATRE DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE DID TO YOU?
HE STOLE PART OF ME
SOMETHING ABOUT THAT DR TRAUM BLOKE SOMETHING ABOUT HIS EYES. I RECOGNIZED SOMEHOW
LISTEN, ANGELA I'VE NEVER PLAYED NURSEMAID TO AN ANGEL BEFORE IS THERE SOMETHING YOU CAN TELL US? TO HELP US HELP YOU"
ALLOWED ROUND
WHAT'S THAT?
PLEASE ...OUGH HALLOWED GROUND TAKE ME
TAKE ME THERE


I SUPPOSE THIS COURSE OF ACTION MIGHT HAVE OCCURRED TO ME EVENTUALLY BUT THEN AGAIN, I HAVE NEVER BEEN WHAT ONE WOULD DEEM A RELIGIOUS "CHURCHGOER"
ALWAYS FOUND THEM TO BE RATHER SPOOKY TO BE HONEST
COME ON HURRY
OH HER THERE ON THAT STAGE THINGIE
ALTAR IT'S CALLED AN ALTAR
GOD WHAT'S CALLED AT ALL
ZEPHON SEE IF YOU CAN T SNIFF OUT SOME W NE IM GOING TO SUPPOSE THIS IS HOLY WATER HERE
COME ON T S IN HERE SOMEWHERE AN SMELL T
HURRY ZEPHON PLEASE SHE S SHAKING
NOT T


BLOODY CHRIST! THIS LOT ISN'T BAD. I'D FANCY A SIP OR TWO MYSELF
PLEASE JEPHON THIS REALLY ISN'T THE TIME TO BE BLASPHEMING. WE NEED ALL THE HELP WE CAN GET
WHAT RIGHT SORRY I'M UP THERE
DOES ANYONE KNOW HOW THIS WORKS? DOES A PRIEST NEED TO ACESS IT
JUST GIVE IT TO ME
TRY AND HOLD HER HEAD STILL THERE WE GO

I DON'T THINK IT'S OUT OF PLACE TO SAY I'M A MAN OF THE WORLD.
DO YOU THINK THIS IS A GOOD THING OR A BAD THING?
WE'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH
I HAVE LIVED A LONG AND VARIED LIFE
I HAVE TRAVELED TO PLACES THAT AREN'T EVEN THERE ANYMORE
RIGHT THEN I'M GOING TO SAY IT WORKED.
SEEN THINGS MOST PEOPLE NEVER EVEN DREAM OF


BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING THAT CAN COMPARE TO WHAT I SAW THAT NIGHT
THE UNWELCOME GLORY OF A DAUGHTER OF HEAVEN

WHEN SHE
UNCLOAKED AND VERY VERY PISSED.

I WILL DESTROY HIM ATOM BY ATOM NO ONE HUMBLES ME LIKE THAT
I WILL STRIP THE ENTIRE HEMISPHERE BARE BEFORE I LET HIM GET AWAY
NOW WHERE'S HE?
BACK AT HOME NURSING HIS BRUISED BOLLOCKS, IF I HAD TO GUESS
DEAR GOD SHE REALLY IS. SHE'S.
LISELLE HENRI GET OUT OF HERE YOU DON'T NEED TO SEE THIS
NO I CAN FEEL HIM HERE WATCHING US
THE DOOR IT WON'T OPEN

Ha
HA
HE'S HERE
HERE? WHERE?
HA ha HA
I DON'T KNOW EVERYWHERE I THINK
HA ha HA Ha
ha
ha HA HA Ha ha HA

LOOK AT THE BLOODY SHADOWS.
THERE
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IF I COULD DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION CENTER STAGE...

ONE BUTTERFLY ESCAPED MY NET AND IT BROUGHT ME TWO MORE A GOOD DAY'S HUNT I'D SAY
GATHERED FOR YOUR AMUSEMENT AS WELL AS YOUR EDIFICATION S A TRIO OF RARE AND EXOTIC CREATURES
A RATHER SCUTTLY ATTIRED ANGEL A FLEA-BITTEN LYCANTHROPE AND A FAERIE MAID WHO DOESN'T KNOW TO MIND HER OWN BLOODY BUSINESS
COWERING BEHIND THEM, STAGE LEFT, YOU'LL NOTICE A PAIR OF RATHER USELESS MORTALS, CLEARLY PRODUCTS OF UNINSPIRED BREEDING
A RATHER MOTLEY LOT TO BE SURE BUT ALL SHARE A COMMON LINK
THIS TIME YOU UNDERSTOOD SOMETHING, MY WILLFUL LASS THIS WORLD IS MY GARDEN MY PLAYGROUND WHAT I WANT, I TAKE, AND WHAT I TAKE I KEEP
IS THAT CLEAR?
GO TO HELL!
THEY ALL BELONG TO ME.
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WHAT WE HAVE JUST SEEN IS A DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPECIMEN'S NATURAL DEFENSES
NOW I'LL AIN'T

WHILE HOT ARCS OF PUREST LIGHT WRESTLED WITH COAL BLACK RIBBONS OF DARKNESS, WINING AROUND ONE ANOTHER LIKE HINDI SNAKES
FROM THE CHEAP SEATS, T MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE A SIGHT
INSIDE, T WAS BLOODY HELL ON EARTH
THE ANGEL SEETHED WITH RAGE, OCEANS OF FURY WELLING UP BEHIND HER EYES.
AND THE STRANGER JUST LAUGHED, CACKLING AT HER DEFIANCE
LAUGHING AT THE MEMORY OF THOSE WHO HAD GONE BEFORE
YOU BELIEVE IT'S OVER RIGHT

I BELONG TO NO ONE!
WHAT?
HE'S NOT HUMAN HE HAS NO...
WHAT WHAT IS HE?
NO CLUE BUT HE'S NOT HUMAN HE HAS NO SCENT
...NO?
THAT'S IT
...KNOW WHAT HE IS
HA HA HA HA HA

WHAT THE DEVIL
WHERE AM I?
HERE!!
WE ARE IN MY REALM NOW
AND NOW DOCTOR TRAUM ARE IN RATHER DEEP SHIT
E I MAY DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION CENTER STAGE. YOU WILL NOTICE A MISERABLE LITTLE BASTARD PISSING HIS KNICKERS AS HE REALIZES THAT HE'S COMPLETELY AND UTTERLY POWERLESS
ISN'T THAT SO ONCE?
NOW - IT'LL BE!
NOW
OH NO
BECAUSE YOU ARE CUT OFF CUT OFF FROM THE DARK WEB THAT FEEDS YOU
THIS IS MY GARDEN. EARTH. YOU WERE A WALKING NIGHTMARE BUT HERE YOU DON'T EVEN RATE A STRAY SADLITTLE THOUGHT
DO YOU THINK I WOULD HAVE BROUGHT YOU TO MY HOME AND IT THOUGHT YOU A THREAT
YOU ARE NOTHING
YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN NOW DON'T YOU

THEY WERE BACK BEFORE I EVEN HAD TIME TO BLINK
GOT IT ALL SORTED THEN HALE YOU
HE'S GONE HE WON'T BE COMING BACK ANYT ME SOON
WHAT WAS E? WHAT WAS THAT THAT THING?
HE WAS A DREAM A VERY POWERFUL DREAM
ANGELA ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
COMPLETELY DESICATE
BUT I THINK I'LL GET OVER IT
OF COURSE YOU WILL YOU'LL BE METING OUT THE WRATH OF GOD AGAIN IN NO T ME
THANK YOU ALL OF YOU FOR EVERYTHING
ANYONE HUNGRY? I COULD ABSOLUTELY MURDER A STEAK RIGHT NOW
SOD THE SILLY OLD BASTARD I QUITE LIKE WHAT YOU'RE WEARING

Epilogue

Do empires really dream?

Can one nation's collective lust for conquest congeal itself into human form, a spectre so daring as to loot the vaults of Heaven itself? Certainly stranger things have happened.

They happen every day in fact.

Does the empire form the dream or does the dream make the empire? This I cannot say. But soon after our adventure with the mysterious Doctor Traum, the days of Great Victoria were numbered. The world spanning power we once thought would endure for centuries came crashing down, perhaps forever.

Many years later, Lady Kildare would quit this grey little island once and for all. Not to return to her homeland, but rather to make her way on the glittering streets of the New World. Pity. No small measure of magic was lost to us when she left.

I myself had considered leaving, many times. The mysterious east, perhaps, or the ripe green jungles of South America. But I never have. Maybe someday. There's still some hunt left in these old bones of mine, after all.

I still receive letters from Lady Kildare on a semi-regular basis. Lavender-scented missives filled with great whimsy, wild humour and an appalling number of vulgarities.

I shall always treasure her as the rarest of friends.

The Angel we never heard from again.

Cover Gallery